Al-Risala 1987

May

Editorial

National integration, one of the most widely discussed subjects today, is undeniably the greatest need of our country. Difficult of achievement, it is nevertheless a sine qua non of national progress.

No one who wishes his own country well would dispute the fact that national integration is a goal of supreme importance. But, when it comes to finding ways and means of accomplishing this, it becomes evident that there are many factions which are totally at variance with each other. One in particular would have it that the entire populace should have a common ideology and a uniform creed. But the creation of a mono-society of this kind would be an impossible task, because it would be such a strange divagation from, if not an actual perversion of the laws of nature. No scheme which runs counter to nature can ever succeed in this world.

It is an established fact that no two human beings have exactly the same physical structure. No two sets of finger prints are ever the same, and that is why individuals can be identified from them with one hundred per cent certainity. Science has even gone so far as to prove that every particle of the human body is different from its counterpart in another human body! This difference in particles exists not only in the body but also in the brain. It has been proved by biological studies that no two human brains are identical. The face being a reflection of the brain, it is seldom that two faces resemble each other in every particular. With all these physical and psychological divergences, how is it possible to rally all human beings around one system of belief? To have a single ideology is against the entire system of nature. When the creator has ordained diversity as a distinguishing feature of human beings, it cannot be arbitrarily abolished. The only way you can begin to solve the attendant problems is by frankly accepting the fact that this diversity exists and will continue to exist.

Hence our belief that the secret of national integration lies in intellectual *adjustment* rather than in legislative impositions. To this end, we must explore the areas which could possibly provide us with a common basis for making reciprocal adjustments without the special identities of individuals and groups becoming lost or obscured.

Even without going into these niceties, we can state one clear-cut and fundamental principle which should form the practical basis of national integration. It is simply that everyone should enjoy personal freedom, and that freedom should be curtailed only when it is likely to be harmful or infringe upon the rights of others. There is a story from the days of America's newly-won independence from foreign political domination which admirably illustrates this point. It seems that a newly liberated American, out to celebrate his freedom in his own way, strutted exuberantly down the street, swinging his arms in a carefree manner with scant regard for the convenience of other pedestrians. Eventually he hit a passerby on the nose. The latter was enraged and shouted: "What kind of foolishness is this? Why are you walking

in this frivolous manner and swinging your hands about in this way?" "America is free," replied the man. "1'm free to do as I want and walk as I wish." "Well," said the passerby, "your freedom ends where my nose begins!"

It is quite possible for everyone to be free in his actions, but his freedom ends where his actions begin to encroach upon the lives of others. Enjoying freedom of action must also entail the honouring of other's freedom. In this lies the secret of successful national integration.

3 May 1987

When knowledge is reduced to an avenue towards personal prestige

‘Ubayy ibn Ka’ab said: “Acquire knowledge, and practice it. Do not acquire it in order to beautify yourselves thereby, for there will come a time when learning will be used as an adornment, as people adorn themselves with Clothes.”

3 May 1987

One who lies is a hypocrite

The Prophet was asked whether a coward could be a believer, and he said yes. Then he was asked whether a miser could be a believer, and he said yes. When asked if a liar could be a believer, he no. Knuzaifa ibn'ul-Yaman remarked that in the time of the Prophet, one used to be counted as a hypocrite when one lied. "But nowadays I hear one of you uttering such lies at least ten times a day."

4 May 1987

Fasting

On the subject of fasting the Prophet said, “Every good deed is rewarded from ten to 700 fold. But God has said that ‘fasting is for Me, and I will give it its reward. Man abstains from food and from satisfying his desires for My Sake?’ One who fasts is destined to have two joys: one at the time of *Aftar* (the breaking of the fast) and the other when he meets his Lord.”

Fasting as a form of worship has a unique quality which distinguishes it from all other forms of obeisance. While fasting, man not only abstains from normally permissible food and drink and from the satisfaction of lawful desires, but he also demonstrates in the process his determination not to hesitate if at any time he should be required to give up the barest necessities of life for the sake of God. He shows his willingness to go beyond obedience to sacrifice. It is because of this special aspect of fasting as a form of worship that it has been singled out for a higher form of reward.

In this world, being a true believer does not just mean marking the difference between right and wrong, lawful and unlawful and then acting accordingly. There are times, when, in unusual circumstances, we have to hold back even from lawful things. Sometimes we are obliged to adopt the policy not of resistance, but of avoidance. Sometimes the desire to show oneself in the right is overwhelming, but one has to stay one’s hand. Sometimes one has to remain silent in spite of having right on one’s side and great eloquence at one’s command. Sometimes one has to halt in one’s stride in spite of having the strength to press onwards. Sometimes one knows certain actions to be right, but has to refrain from taking any active steps.

Fasting teaches us the lesson that in this world it sometimes happens that a lawful thing becomes unlawful and a desired thing becomes undesirable. Those who succeed in living their lives according to this stringent standard of piety deserve such munificent reward from God as defies the imagination.

4 May 1987

Rejoicing in the Muslims' prosperity

'Abdullah Ibn' Abbas once said: "Whenever I hear that rain has fallen on a Muslim town I am happy; even though I myself have no cattle grazing there."

(Tabrani)

5 May 1987

The Discovery Method

In education, there is a recently developed method of imparting skins and knowledge, based on research carried out by Jean Piaget and Jerom Brune, which does not give the student all of the data he needs, but attempts to create situations in which he feels the desire to learn things by exercising his own mind. This is called the 'discovery method'. According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica:

This method emphasizes problem-solving, minimizing guidance by the teacher and maximizing the student's opportunity for exploration and trial and error (EB III/572).

This principle in the education of children is based on the realities of human nature, for man has an inherent urge to increase his knowledge and, moreover, wishes to learn things by discovering them for himself. And whatever he discovers by himself forms a permanent part of his cultural repertoire. He tends to forget knowledge imparted by others, but what he has taken pains to discover himself, he never forgets.

Religious teaching employs the discovery method too. It takes us only so far along the path of truth and leaves us to quest after the unseen. Although the Quran teaches us about God, we must be constantly seeking after Him. It may tell us too of Paradise, but we shall have full knowledge of it only by striving to be pure in thought, word and deed. Belief in the unseen means an eternal quest to bring the unknown within our human sphere of knowledge. If God has hidden Himself and the world Hereafter from the eyes of men, it is because man must make their discovery himself. Bringing what lies in the unseen world into the seen world is all a matter of faith. The more one is strenghened in such faith, the higher one's hopes may be of entering the gates of Paradise.

5 May 1987

How to tell between good and bad

“When should I think of myself as pious?” someone asked Aishah. “When you start thinking of yourself as impious,” she replied. “And when should I think of myself as impious?” the person asked once again. “When you start Thinking of yourself as pious,” came Aishah’s reply.

6-7 May 1987

If We Gain, Why Not?

A short time ago, I happened to meet an Indian leader who publishes an Urdu weekly. For a long time this paper had run at a loss, but later picked up and started making a profit. The history of its phenomenal upswing was interesting to listen to. He told me that when he had launched this enterprise, there seemed to be no way that the circulation could be made to exceed 3,000, and that this was a state of affairs which continued for a long time in spite of his best efforts. Then, in 1985, came the controversy over the Ayodhya mosque (to the Muslims, the Babari Masiid and, to the Hindus the Ram Janam Bhumi). Exploiting this issue to the full, he brought out a spate of sensational articles – most of them sheer bombast – with deliberately provocative captions. As anticipated, his paper's circulation soared from a mere 3,000 to a spectacular 30,000. Congratulatory letters began to pour in from all sides.

While the Babari Masjid type of dispute is bad news for the Muslim community at large, it is, on the contrary, the best possible news for the leaders of that community, for that is the kind of news which is grist to every political and journalistic mill. It is no exaggeration to say that while, for the general Muslim public, it is a tragedy, for the leaders it is more of a comedy. It would be wrong to think that this applies only to a few stray cases; it applies to entire Muslim leadership and the entire field of Muslim journalism.

The above success story reminded me of a certain Muslim villager who made a habit of visiting graves and Durgahs (saints shrines) to ask for favours, although, strictly speaking, a good Muslim should visit such sites only to pray for the departed souls, the granting of favours being the prerogative of the Almighty. A religious scholar who lived in the vicinity tried to make him see the error of his ways by pointing out that such an act was tantamount to polytheism *(Shirk),* but the villager's experience told him otherwise. It seems that whatever he had asked for at a graveside has been granted to him – even the birth of a male child. The advice of the scholar, therefore, made no sense to him, and he countered with: "if I benefit from going there, why should not I go?"

For the past twenty years, the writer has been advising Muslim leaders to eschew emotionalism in politics and to adopt a quiet constructive approach. To this end I have had meetings with the more prominent of the Muslim leaders, entered into correspondence with them, focused attention on this issue through my writings and tried in every way possible to elucidate this point so fully that they would be left with no arguments against my point of view. Yet no Muslim leader is willing to accept this advice. It is because they are no different from the villager by the graveside. Each Muslim leader in his heart of heart thinks: "why not dabble in emotionalism? It is to my advantage."

It is a stark reality that what gives the greatest boost to both Muslim leadership and journalism is rioting. If communal riots were to cease in this country, we should see an end to their dominating influence.

According to Sajid Rashid, an Urdu journalist of considerable experience, "The most popular topic of the majority of Urdu newspapers is 'riots' and that, too, only Hindu-Muslim riots. The Urdu papers now find it inconceivable that a new issue should be published without some such sensational item. This is a matter of personal experience. The youthful editor of a weekly paper actually expressed such a desire to me. 'If only there could be a riot – the circulation of my paper would increase.'

"Most of the Urdu journalists are victims of this selfsame disease. Pick up any Muslim weekly and you will be confronted with such a picture of victimization and persecution as would persuade you that there is no community more persecuted and more pitiable than the Muslims.

"There can be no two opinions about the fact that Muslims are fuel to the fire of communalism in this country. But the way this is presented by Muslim journalists is having an adverse effect on Muslim morale, hence their sense of insecurity and persecution. A feeling of this kind so undermines the spirit of self-reliance and power of decision-making that many in the Muslim world have begun to suffer from a kind of mental paralysis. We have to realize that, wittingly or unwittingly, most of the Urdu papers are engaged in the dangerous ploy of incapacitating the entire community."

(*Urdu Times,* Bombay, 14 September, 1986).

8 May 1987

The Law of the Universe

A cow gives milk. This is a universally accepted fact. But there are few who pause to think *how* it accomplishes this useful feat. In fact it can produce milk only because it has the capacity to convert grass into milk. It is this unique ability to convert a simple substance into a more complex one which makes it possible in God's world for it to produce the precious liquid we call milk.

A similar capacity is found in trees and plants. From them we receive grain, vegetables and fruits. But under what conditions does this happen? It happens when the plant receives water and nutrients from the earth and then converts these into vegetables and fruits. A lower entity is admitted into the plant, the internal mechanism of which reproduces it in the form of a higher entity.

The same applies to the life of man. A process of conversion has to take place, if results are to be produced. To attain success, man has to take the stimuli of his environment, both positive and negative, his education whether good or bad, his moral and physical inheritance and 'convert' these into success in the way that a plant converts the nutrients from the soil into fruits. He has even to take his failures and extract from them such experience as will set him on a better and more successful course for the future.

Such is the law of the world, both for mankind and for other living things, whoever has the capacity to seize opportunities when they come his way and convert adverse into favourable circumstances will achieve success, while those who show themselves incapable of this feat will be doomed to failure.

The cow has been created by God as a sign of His will. It indeed shows us what God requires of us in this world. We may take in 'grass'; but we must give out 'milk'. Even when people wrong us, we are required to convert that wrong into a right. Even when we are beset by adversity, we are required to turn it to good account.

8 May 1987

One who will be saved from Doom on the Day of Judgement

"On the Day of Resurrection, God will save from Hell-fire one who has saved his brother from humiliation in this world;" these words were spoken by the Prophet Mohammad.

9 May 1987

In the Nick of Time

A medical college professor, putting a student through an oral examination, asked him, “How many of these pills would you give to a man who had suffered a heart attack?” “Four,” replied the student. A minute later, he piped up, “Professor, can I change my *answer?”* “You can, by all means,” said the professor, looking at his watch. “But, regrettably, your patient has already been dead for 40 seconds.”

Certain matters in life are so critical that they require the appropriate step to be taken without a moment’s hesitation. But an instant decision must also be a correct one, otherwise the consequences could be drastic, and could mean a lifetime of repentance.

Our moments of decision-making are often very similar to our attempts to board a train. Catching a train requires preparation. We have to pack up our luggage, making sure we take the right things with us, buy a ticket, arrange transport to take us to the station and we must, of course, already be on the platform at the appointed time, otherwise we are surely going to be left behind. For the train is no respecter of persons. It arrives on time and departs on time, and pays no heed whatsoever to tardy passengers. If we are like the medical student who was caught on the wrong foot because of lack of preparation and who was much too late with the correct answer, the train of life will go on its scheduled course and we shall be left standing, wondering what to do next and how to avert the disastrous consequences of our failure to get on board. It is, therefore, necessary to be prepared for all eventualities in life. That means assiduously acquiring a good education and losing no time in gaining useful experience relevant to our chosen occupations. It above all requires a mental and physical readiness to seize opportunities when they come our way, and to be firm of purpose, never permitting one’s energy to be frittered away in pointless vacillation.

9 May 1987

Man will find himself standing on the verge of Hell

This was the first sermon the Prophet delivered on reaching Medina: “People, send forth for the future; you will surely reap the fruits of your actions.”

10 May 1987

Where Islam and Other Religions Differ

It is stated in the Quran: “He that chooses a religion other than Islam it will not be accepted from him, and in the world to come he will be one of the lost” (3 : 85).

The usual explanation of this verse is that Islam will become a means of salvation in the Hereafter because it is a complete religion; its Prophet is the greatest of all the Prophets; its Scripture is the most sacred of all the Scriptures. But this is not consistent with what is said in the Quran, and is little better than a weak argument in favour of a strong point. It also contradicts the saying, which appears in several places in the Quran, that “God does not wrong His servants in the slightest.” It contradicts it, because it would have us believe that God had discriminated between different sets of human beings, in giving to those who lived before the Final Prophet an inferior religion and to those who came afterwards a superior religion. Such an allegation cannot be laid at God’s door. It is contrary to God’s nature that he should discriminate between his creatures in the bestowing of His mercy.

The true reason for Islam being the sole way to salvation is that it is the one and only religion preserved in its original form. In their own times, previous religions were just as valid as Islam is today. But the scriptures of old were tampered with. Their adherents interpolated and deleted at will. This having happened, these scriptures ceased to be authentic sources for the understanding of the Will of God. This is the sole reason that other religions fell by the wayside in later times, and that Islam alone survives as the one source of True Guidance.

10 May 1987

Death of the soul comes from seeking worldly gain from religion

Imam Hasan Basri the famous eighth century religious scholar, said: “A learned man is punished when his heart dies,” asked how his heart died, he replied, “By seeking the world through actions which should be directed towards the hereafter.”

11 May 1987

Trouble from Within

The Muslims entered Spain in 92 A.H. and their rule in that country only came to an end in 897 A.H. But most of their 800 years there were spent in fighting the Christian armies, and during the last days, Muslim rule had become confined to Granada, while a vast area stretching on all sides was ruled by Ferdinand II (1452-1516).

Sultan Abul Hasan ascended the throne in 870 A.H. By this time the area of the Muslim state had been reduced to 4,000 square miles, while Ferdinand's Christian Kingdom had expanded to about 125,000 square miles. Ferdinand demanded that tribute should be paid to him by Sultan Abul Hasan, but the latter, being a man of courage, wrote in reply to the Christian King, "In the mint in Granada swords are now being made, instead of gold and silver coins, with which to smite you Christians." War then broke out between the two kings. In the course of the fighting, Sultan Abul Hasan defeated Ferdinand several times, but the final victory was won by Ferdinand.

The principal reason for the Muslim defeat was the role played by sultan Abul Hasan's own son, Abdullah Mohammad. After defeating Ferdinand's armies on 27 Jamadiul Awwal, in 887 A.H., the Sultan returned to find that his son, instigated by his mother, Fatimah, had raised the banner of rebellion against him. Supported by the garrison, this rebel son seized the Alhambra in 1482 and made himself master of Granada. This state of affairs led to a destructive civil war.

In the meantime, the Christian army was advancing, and one town after another had fallen before it. The Muslims found themselves in an ever-diminishing circle until only the doomed capital of Granada remained in their hands. Abu Abdullah was asked to surrender the city, but he refused. Ferdinand then with an army of 10,000 horse entered the plain of Granada and laid siege to the capital. The city was finally starved into surrender. The Christian army then entered Granada on January 2, 1492 and, on its towers, the crescent was supplanted by the cross.

Most of the defeats suffered by Muslims in the past have been the result of in-fighting. But this factor, one of the most decisive in Islamic history, is one of the least appreciated by the Muslims of today, for, heedless of the lesson which the past has to teach, they continue to engage in self-centered factionalism and mindless Insurrection.

12 May 1987

Another Day! How Wonderful!

"When you wake up in the morning, jump out of bed and shout 'Great! Another day!' You are a success." This was a view expressed by a prominent businessman, but it could very well be the view of the scholar, the sage, the ascetic, depending upon how you interpret success. Anyone, in fact, who regards the new day with such optimism is surely well-equipped, mentally and emotionally, to tackle whatever life has in store for him. But, whether we regard the appearance of the new day as one more joyful occasion for work or not can we honestly say that we have ever stopped to ponder over the miraculous aspect of day following night, for all eternity, as a result of the earth rotating on its axis and of the sun's never ceasing to flood with life-giving light on ever-changing hemisphere? Have we ever thought of this alternation of day and night as a totally unique occurrence and of this all being part of the divine pattern which produces such advantageous conditions for human existence? Nowhere in the universe, in fact, are there prime conditions such as we have on earth for the emergence and development of life as we know it. Other heavenly bodies are either too hot, too cold, too gaseous, too windswept or too fiery, or can be like Jupiter and the moon, proceeding in their respective orbits without rotating on their axes, so that one half of the globe is permanently illuminated while the other is for ever plunged in darkness. The denizen of such a sphere would have no rising sun to stir his enthusiasm and no peaceful sunset to signal the moment for rest. He would have no periods of vigour and achievement alternating with soothing periods of repose. For the human being, accustomed to his diurnalnoctunal alternation, such an existence would be one of utter staleness and weariness, with no refreshment ever in sight. Yet this pattern, to which all living things on earth have been attuned from time immemorial, is something which we take for granted, and for which we do not consider it necessary to offer up our thanks. But this unique ordering of day and right is God's own doing, for the especial benefit of man, and we would do well never to lose sight of what an extraordinary blessing it is.

13 May 1987

Its Own Proof

There are many parts of the Quran which, on the surface, appear to be mere assertions, there being no evidence to support them. But, the fact is, that these statements are their own proof, for the language in which they are couched is superhuman. It is God alone – and no other – who is able to utter such words.

"Allah is He who created the heavens and the earth." (*Quran* 14:32). This is a sentence which can never be uttered with regard to any being other than God. This in itself is evidence of its truth, for the only One who can make such a statement is He who is, indeed, the creator of the heavens and the earth. None other could ever dare make a statement of such vast significance. Indeed, throughout the history of the world, there is no record of anyone ever having had the audacity to say: "I have created the heavens and the earth."

"Think! If Allah should enshroud you in perpetual night till the Day of Resurrection, what other god could give you light? .... Think! If Allah should give you perpetual day, until the Resurrection, what other god could bring you the night to sleep in? (*Quran,* 28:71-72)."

It befits no one other than Allah to utter these words, and that is why no one has had the courage to make such a statement. This in itself is ample proof that these are the words of God.

It is said in the Quran that surely "it is Allah who keeps the heavens and the earth from falling. Should they fall, none could hold them back but He. (*Quran,* 35 : 41) Ponder over these words. Who could ever have the temerity to utter them? Only one who is above the heavens and the earth could say such a thing, One who in actual fact has the power to keep the heavens and the earth under His control. No one could say such a thing as a matter of postulation. No human being has it in him to make divine utterances with his human tongue. This is a divine statement such as could only have been made by God.

14-15 May 1987

Happiness

"Happiness is not a station you arrive at but a manner of travelling." This very perceptive remark, made by Margaret Lee Ruhbeck, is worth turning over in the minds, for so many of us think of happiness as a destination which we must reach sooner or later, provided that we just make sufficient efforts to do so. Yet consistent effort to produce happiness so often ends in failure. We think if we acquire enough wealth, heap up possessions, dress stylishly, have a large circle of friends, make interesting trips and so on and so forth, We shall necessarily be happy, but more often than one might imagine, all this is accompanied by a feeling of unease, of inadequacy, even of despair. It is because we have made the mistake of thinking of happiness as the sum of a series of different types of pleasures and, as such, something to be set up as a goal and striven towards. But the more we hurl ourselves at this objective, the further it seems to remove itself from our grasp. There is also the view that happiness can be attained by avoidance of difficulties, responsibilities and unpleasantness of all kinds. But this negative approach yields no better results than a frantic scrabbling after pleasures. The strangest aspect of this problem is that it is mostly people who never think of their own happiness who achieve the most enviable state of contentment. The others who find that happiness seems to have come to them quite unexpectedly are those who have made up their minds to do without happiness, and to devote themselves to worthwhile tasks without expecting any particular reward. Often such activities yield great happiness without that ever having been their objective.

Happiness is indeed an extremely elusive mental state. Let us suppose that we seem fated never to be happy, because perhaps we are forced to live in conditions of great deprivation or adversity. The best way to deal with this situation is simply to accept it, and then to consider what its positive aspects could possibly be. Firstly, our being able to accept such a situation shows a strengthening of the mind and a firming up of the character. Then the process we go through to overcome each difficulty in turn is like the successive fine-honing of tempered steel, or the burnishing of base metal until it shines like gold. When we forget about happiness and apply ourselves to the task in hand, we elevate ourselves to a superior plane of human existence, and it is often at that point, when we least expect it, that we find that happiness is ours.

To expect happiness to be a continuing state, however, is to indulge in illusions. It is something which can come and go, for no rhyme or reason, and constant preoccupation with one's state of unhappiness is likely to plunge one even deeper into despair. The absence of happiness, should be accepted, ignored or treated as something, to be turned to positive account as a matter of experience. It should never be allowed to make one bitter. It should be considered that if a state of happiness does not last forever, neither does a state of unhappiness. The worst error to fall into is to become pre-occupied with one's own happiness to the exclusion of all else. It is more often in giving one's mind, one's affection, one's attention, one's resources – one's very life – to others, that one finds true happiness.

15 May 1987

National Integration

One who has successfully grown a tree from a sapling has also the capacity to grow a whole garden from seed. The case of national Integration is on a clear parallel with this, for just as our whole gardenful of flowers blossoms from a large number of individual seeds, so can our national integration blossom from a large number of individuals. Individual integration is something which we can already be said to be enjoying, for haven't all of us at least one good friend in the opposite community? It is quite clear that the goal we are aiming at the level of society has already been achieved at the level of the individual. Extend your personal experience to society as a Whole and the result will be national integration.

16 May 1987

How Do you Win a Nobel Prize?

Nobel Laureate Professor Abdus Salam toured several Indian cities in 1986, and in one of the speeches he made (*Times of India,* 16 January, 1986), he cited South Korea as an example of extraordinarily rapid national development. He said that about 15 years ago, the gross national product per capita there was equal to that of India, but that thanks to the efforts the Koreans had made, it was now many times more. Giving the example of the team who had come from South Korea to Trieste, in Italy, where he resides, to find out from him how Nobel Prizes were won, he said that a similar spirit needed to be inculcated in the people of the Third world. He felt that it was this questing spirit which was the basis for all progress, be it of an individual or of a nation, and that this was true of progress both in this world and in the world hereafter.

All too often a process of stagnation sets in the affairs of a nation and it would appear that an impasse had been reached in developmental matters. Instead of progress, there is decay. Instead of effort, there is inertia. When this stage is reached, a nation begins to tumble in disarray down the ladder of progress towards the lowermost rung and it is only the seekers; the strivers who can pull it upwards from such an ignominious position and set it back on the path of progress. It is only the questing spirit which can put it right up on the topmost rung of the ladder of progress.

16 May 1987

Weighing up one's own actions before they are weighed up on the divine scales of justice

"Reckon with yourselves," 'Umer said, "before you are reckoned with in the next world; and weigh your own actions before they are weighed on the divine scales of justice; and prepare yourselves for the great appearance (before God)."

16 May 1987

Hardness of heart comes from using religion for worldly ends

"The punishment of a learned man is for his heart to die," said Hasan al-Basri. He was asked what was meant by the death of the heart, and he answered that it came from seeking the world by means of actions which should be gauged towards eternity.

(Jami' bayan al-'ilm wa fadhlihi)

17 May 1987

Religion: A Matter of Divinity, not Sociology

Because of the political framework within which most of our news comes to us today, we tend to bracket nuclear energy with the manufacture and deployment of lethal weaponry whose capacity for destruction fills us with horror. We cannot do else but oppose what we have come to regard as a baneful social phenomenon peculiar to the U.S.A. and U.S.S.R. But are we right in thinking of this only as a social phenomenon which has become the supreme political tool of the major power blocks? We could, equally, regard nuclear energy as a natural phenomenon – one that can be harnessed for the good of mankind – and, thinking of it as a neutral force in life, could assess its merits per se. Then regardless of the uses found for it by warring nations, we should have no qualms about supporting it.

In actual fact, there are very few people who make the mistake of thinking of nuclear energy as a social rather than a natural phenomenon. But there are many who make a very similar mistake in the study of religion. Religion is essentially divine truth. But, thanks to the historians' and anthropologists' persistence in portraying it as a social phenomenon, misconceptions about what religion actually is have taken root in people's minds. The disciplines of sociological studies likewise have done much to prevent the student of religion from being able to distinguish between theory and practice. Hence the widespread and erroneous belief that the conduct of Muslim nations is synonymous with Islamic *doctrines.* It is the old mistake of confusing behaviour with standards of behaviour. It is this way of approaching the subject which has led in recent years to the writing of books such as *The Dagger of Islam* and *Militant Islam.* Their authors, presuming that Muslims are habitually "at daggers drawn" and militant in their demands, concluded that these negative attitudes were features of Islam.

But Islam must be looked at in a different perspective, as a truth revealed by God and preserved in the texts of the *Quran* and *Hadith,* and not as a social phenomenon. Once grasped as an ideology, it cannot then be confused with the sum of human behavioural aberrations. If one truly wishes to understand Islam, one must ultimately think of it as a divine belief.

18-20 May 1987

From Denial to Belief

Professor Chandra Wickramasinghe, a Sri Lankan who heads the department of. Applied Mathematics and Astronomy at University College, Cardiff, Wales, has been conducting research into the origin of life since 1962 in collaboration with the eminent English scientist, Professor Sir Fred Hoyle. The results of their research have been published in the form of a book entitled, *Evolution from Space.*

When the two scientists began their research, they were both agreed on one point: that the notion of a creator is inconsistent with scientific principles. But they were so shocked by their ultimate findings that they had to make a drastic reappraisal of their thinking. "From my earliest training as a scientist," says Wickramasinghe,'1 had been thoroughly brainwashed into believing that science cannot be consistent with any kind of deliberate creation. That notion has had to be very painfully shed. I am quite uncomfortable in the state of mind I now find myself in. But there is no logical way out of it."

Both scientists made separate calculations of the mathematical probability of life on earth having begun spontaneously. Quite independently of each other, the both arrived at the same conclusion that the odds against life on earth having had an accidental beginning were staggering – in mathematical jargon, 10 to the power 40,000. Add 40,000 noughts to the number one and you have the figure. "That number is such an imponderable in the universe that I am 100 per cent certain that life could not have started spontaneously on Earth." says Wickramasinghe.

As they write in their book: "Once we saw that the probability of life originating at random is so utterly minuscule as to make it absurd, it became sensible to think that the properties of physics on which life depends are in every respect deliberate."

"Sir Fred Hoyle was tending much more than I towards the higher intelligence Creator," Wickramasinghe explains. "1 used to argue against it, but I found myself losing every argument. At the moment I can't find any rational argument to knock down the view which argues for conversion to God. If I could have found an argument – even a flimsy one – I would not have been a party to what we wrote in the book. We used to have open minds; now we realize that the only logical answer to life is creation, and not accidental shuffling. I still hope that one day I may go back to favour a purely mechanistic explanation – I say 'hope', because I still cannot come to terms with my conversion.

"My being a Buddhist – albeit not an ardent one – was never a problem, because it is an atheistic religion which does not profess to know anything about creation and does not have a creator built into it. But I now find myself driven to this position by logic. There is no other way in which we can understand the precise ordering of the chemicals of the universe except to invoke creation on a cosmic scale.

Until recently, belief in God was considered to be a mere personal creed, unsupported by rational thought. In recent decades, however, this situation has changed. New evidence has again and again come to light which makes belief in God a scientifically credible concept, rather than just an institutionalized form of anthropomorphism providing a personally desirable creed.

The latest findings of science impress upon man the abstract reality of God's existence. Granted that there is a God, what should man's relationship with Him be? Science does not and cannot occupy itself with this problem. This is a question which can only be answered by religion.

Basically, all religions do attempt to answer this question, but to what extent they are successful is difficult to determine considering that, besides Islam, no world religion has been preserved in its original form. Other shortcomings in present-day religions, no matter what their antiquity, are in some cases, the absence of the concept of a God, (or Creator and Sustainer) and in other cases, the proliferation of gods and goddesses. The definition of man's relationship with God (or the absence of one) by such religions is impossible to accept, because the premises on which they base their doctrines are false. Science certainly does not support polytheism, just as it does not support unconscionable 'religious' tenets such as discrimination on the basis of colour and race.

Just as science brings one to belief in God, so also does it bring one to belief in Islam, for Islam is the only religion which is completely consistent with scientific facts. Science shows that the universe has a God – a fact, which in itself, is enough to prove the agnostics wrong. A study of the cosmos shows that it operates in unity and harmony, thus ruling out the possibility of there being many gods, as is claimed by certain religions. Conversely, such a study makes it abundantly clear that there can be only one God – a concept faithfully presented by Islam, but by no other religion. And as for man's relationship with God, the only religion which can properly define it is, again, Islam.

20 May 1987

Let Not the Scourge of God be Visited upon us

Those who keep dairy cows are faced with the perennial problem of preventing the calves from drinking up all their mothers' milk. This problem is often solved by tying a thorny piece of wood to the calves' heads, so that when they go to drink milk, the thorns prick the udders, causing the cows to shy away.

This 'thorny' approach is reminiscent of the way present-day Muslims behave when they attempt to communicate the divine message with which they have been entrusted to other nations of the world. Although duty-bound to convey the message of Islam to others, they have chosen instead to pick political and economic quarrels with those to whom they should be bringing the word of God. They have simply become worldly rivals of other nations instead of being their religious guides and mentors. Their politics of confrontation are like thorns on the face of the Muslim community which drive non-Muslims away before they can drink the God-given milk of Islam.

If we truly believe in the advent of the Last Day, when people will be called to account for their actions, we must do our utmost to shed these 'thorns'. If we fail to do so, there is a real danger of incurring the wrath of God and having to suffer punishment for the sins of others as well as for our own. We must at all times create an atmosphere which fosters receptivity to the message of Islam and encourages others to see it in its true perspective.

21 May 1987

To Act or Not to Act

According to news items which appeared on the 14th December, 1983, in *The Times of India* and *Hindustan Times,* a Delhi police party in a Matador van gave chase to a white Fiat car in a street near the income tax offices, when it made a sudden U-turn to speed away from them. Its driver had obviously panicked at the sight of a police party on patrol duty. As the police van started gaining ground on the car one of its occupants began firing at it. Now convinced that it was escaping criminals they had to deal with, the police returned the fire. But the fleeing car ultimately sped out of view. That same evening, a dead body was found lying in a street near the Shahadara hospital. It turned out to be the body of one Subhash, a criminal who had been involved in no less than 20 cases of dacoity, and for whom the police were offering a reward of Rs. 15,000 dead or alive. Shortly after being wounded by police gunshots, he had succumbed to his injuries, and been thrown out of the car by the other miscreants.

The fatal outcome of this incident shows how, all too often, the steps we take to avert disaster can simply rebound on us. It was quite possible that if the occupants of the white car had continued their journey in a normal way, they would have aroused no suspicion and would have escaped being hit by the police. Their evasive action and their violence only drove them into a worse predicament.

In this world, there is no one who does not, at some time or the other, have his sagacity put to the test. Those who are ever ready to put up a fight are doomed to failure. In order to succeed in this world we have to know when to act and when to refrain from acting. Sometimes one has to proceed with one's journey – to go straight ahead – but sometimes it is wiser to turn off to the left or the right. The exigencise of daily living in this world are an ongoing test of one's wisdom, and it is only those who can measure up to the severest standards who will ultimately be successful in life.

22-23 May 1987

The Dire Effects of Drinking

A picture published in the *Indian Express* on August 9th, 1986 shows a number of sad-looking individuals with their feet in plaster. Employees of the Chandigarh Fire Service, they had been ordered while on duty, by Mr. R.K. Ranga, Deputy Commissioner and Director of Fire Services, to jump from the top of a 10 foot high fire engine. In complying with this order, they either broke their feet or were otherwise severely injured.

Mr. Ranga explained that he had ordered them to jump in order to test their physical fitness. The explanation that the firemen gave was that when Mr. Ranga gave this order, he was acting under the influence of alcohol.

It is an accepted fact that drunkenness and crime are closely interrelated. Drinking causes such a degeneration of the mind that one's moral sense remains in abeyance, and there are few improprieties that one stops short of. It has been statistically proved that most road accidents occur due to drinking.

The Encyclopaedia Britannica (1984) has this to say:

> "A special offence related to drinking is alcohol-impaired driving of motor vehicles and the resulting high rate of accidents, with fatalities, personal injuries, and property damage. Alcohol, for example, is involved in about one-third of the more than 50,000 annual road traffic fatalities in the United States, in possibly 500,000 injuries to persons, and in more than 1,000,000,000 worth of property damage (1/449)."

On November 6, 1985, *The Times of India* published a report entitled, 'Drink Before Crime.' This report underlined the intimate relationship between crime and the consumption of alcohol:

> "More than half of the jail inmates convicted of violent crimes had been drinking before committing offences, says an official report. In a grim study of alcohol's role in fueling crimes, a report by the U.S. Bureau of Justice showed that, 'altogether, 54 per cent of 32,122 people convicted of violent crimes had been drinking' reports A.P."

It is an indisputable fact that excessive drinking is one of the greatest causes of evil today, for it paralyzes the human capacity to think and feel. It suppresses the voice of conscience which point to what is right and what is wrong, warning man of the consequences of his deeds. What should be the greatest deterrents to the committing of crimes – a sense of shame, fear of consequences, love of one's fellow-men–are stifled by the state of intoxication which leaves man senseless and without scruples.

That is why, in all revealed scriptures, alcohol is declared unlawful. Even a small quantity of it, which might appear to be harmless, is prohibited, so that man should adopt an attitude of total disgust towards it and treat it as the abomination that it is.

23 May 1987

In Giving We Receive

According to *Time Magazine* of October 17, 1986, “her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II had long voiced a desire to visit the People’s Republic of China. But as long as Britain ruled a piece of Chinese territory, the crown colony of Hong Kong, such a journey was impossible. The 1984 Sino-British agreement returning Hong Kong to China in 1997 provided the price of admission” (22).

Returning Hong Kong to the mainland was no easy task, for it amounted to losing a jewel from the British Crown, but it was clear that the British Monarch’s desire to visit China was not unconnected with Britain’s avidity for trade with that country and, obviously, the ensuing gains would be immense. Relations between Britain and China had been uneasy over the last hundred years, but with the Queen’s historic visit – the first ever made to China by a member of a British Royal family – the gates to trade were thrown open. A successful piece of diplomacy, it paved the way to an annual trade agreement of over one and a half billion dollars.

A jewel may have been lost from the crown, but the subsequent benefits will be enormous. Clearly, we have to give in order to take. That is the way of the world.